

Ibn al-Athīr's Accounts of the Rūs

1. al-Kāmil fi 't-Ta'rīkh, viii, 412-415

“The Rūs Seizure of the Town of Barda'a” (332 A.H./943-944 A.D.)

In this year (332) armed bands of Rūs went by sea (the Caspian) to the region of Adharbayjān, going from the sea up the Kūr River (the Kura), which is a large river. They eventually landed at Barda'a. The representative of al-Marzubān in Barda'a met them when he gathered a force from the Daylamis and [other Muslim] volunteers, which force numbered more than five thousand men. He engaged the Rūs, and it was only a short time until the Muslims were routed, and the Daylamis were killed to the last man. The Rus then entered the town and the representative of al-Marzubān fled on whatever riding animal he could find. The Rūs encamped in the area and policed it for security. They were good in their conduct. The Muslim warriors drew near to the Rūs from every direction, and the Rūs were quarreling with each other, but the Muslims (the Muslim warriors) did not attack them. The masses of people in the district then came out and attacked the Rūs with stones, and injured them.

The Rūs forbade this action, but the inhabitants did not refrain [from the assault], only the sensible ones who held back their inclinations, and it is known that neither the

masses nor the mob can master their appetites. After this lasted for a long time, they ordered the people of the town to depart and [they said that] they would not attack the townsmen for an interval of three days, and an individual was free to leave with whatever possessions he could carry. Most of the townsmen remained [in Barda'a] after the appointed time, and the Rūs then killed many people, and they took some ten thousand souls captive. They gathered those who remained in the Friday Mosque, and they said to the remaining townsmen: "You can either ransom yourselves or we will kill you." A Christian came forth and settled on twenty dirhams for each man. But the Rūs did not keep to their bargain, except for the sensible ones, after they realized that they would not receive anything for some townsmen. They massacred all of those [for whom they could receive no ransom], and only a few fled from the massacre. The Rūs then took the valuables of the people and enslaved the remaining prisoners, and took the women and enjoyed them.

"The March of al-Marzubān to the Rūs and His Victory Over Them" (332 A.H./943-944 A.D.)

The Muslims regarded the control of the people of Barda'a by the Rūs to be an important matter, and they assembled [another] army. Al-Marzubān Ibn Muhammad gathered the people and he led them to war. He commanded as many as

thirty thousand men, but he did not attack the Rūs [directly]. He skirmished with them in the mornings and the evenings, but he returned defeated from the battles. This continued in the same manner for many days. The Rūs then advanced in the direction of Marāgha. They ate a great deal of fruit which made them ill, and the number of Rūs who became sick and died from the tainted fruit steadily grew.

When al-Marzubān saw that this situation continued, he devised a stratagem. He decided to conceal an ambush, march towards the Rūs with his army, and then recoil. The Rūs would engage in a pursuit, and his men who were concealed would fall upon the Rūs. He explained the plan to his followers and he set up the ambush. He then went out to engage the Rūs. He and his men attacked the Rūs and then recoiled. The Rūs pursued them until they arrived at the site of the ambush. Their army of al-Marzubān maintained a unified front, and did not fight the Rūs one on one.

It is reported that al-Marzubān said: "I told my men to return to the charge, but they did not move forward because they feared the Rūs. I understood that if my troops continued in their retreat, the Rūs would kill most of them. Then the Rūs arrived at the site of the ambush. They uncovered the men who were waiting in ambush and they killed those who had left [their positions]. Then I personally returned to the charge, with my brother and my minister following me. I prepared myself mentally for martyrdom.

Then most of the Daylamis returned to help us, feeling ashamed [of their cowardice]. They came and did battle with the Rūs, and we called the signal for our other men who were still hidden in the ambush to come out and assist us. They attacked the Rūs in the rear, and we took the initiative against them in battle. We killed many of the Rūs, including their prince. The rest of the Rūs retreated to the citadel of the town, which is called Shahrīstan. This is the location to which they moved their many possessions, and where they placed their prisoners and their booty.”

Al-Marzubān then surrounded them and strengthened his forces. He then received news that Abū ‘Abd Allah al-Husayn Ibn Sa’id Ibn Hamdāni had gone to Adharbayjān and proceeded to Salmās. Abū was the cousin of Nāsir ad-Dawla, and was sent by the latter to take possession of Adharbayjān. When news of this reached al-Marzubān, he left his men, who were maintaining a blockade of the town, and he marched to Abū Ibn Hamdāni. They fought a battle, but snow began to fall and Ibn Hamdāni’s troops disbanded because most of them were Bedouin. Then Abu Ibn Hamdāni received a letter from Nāsir ad-Dawla, informing him of the death of Tūzūn and of his intention to go to Baghdād. Nāsir ordered Abū Ibn Hamdāni to return to him and he did so.

As for the followers of al-Marzubān, they continued to give battle to the Rūs. When the Rūs buried one of their men,

they buried his weapons with him. The Muslims thus found many things after the departure of the Rūs. The Rūs spent the night in the citadel, and then they took what [moveable items] they wished from their booty on their backs and went to the Kūr River (Kura), and sailed away in their ships. The followers of al-Marzubān were too weary to pursue them, so they gathered their things and they left Barda'a. And so Allah cleansed the Rūs from the land.

2. al-Kāmil fī 't-Ta'rīkh, viii, 508

“The Battle of Hadath” (343 A.H./954-955 A.D.)

In this year, in the month of Rabī'a al-'Awwal, Saif ad-Dawla Ibn Hamdān raided the country of ar-Rūm (Byzantium). He took male and female captives, and booty. Among those killed was Constantine, son of ad-Dumustaq (Bardas Phocas), which was distressing ar-Rūm and to ad-Dumustaq. Ad-Dumustaq then gathered his troops from among ar-Rūm, ar-Rūs, al-Bulghār, and others, and went towards the frontier. Saif ad-Dawla marched towards him and they met at Hadath, in the month of Sha'bān. The battle between ad-Dumustaq and Saif ad-Dawla became intense, and the troops stoutly endured [the conflict]. Then, Allah, the Exalted One, granted the victory to the Muslims. Ar-Rūm was defeated and a great number of men were killed. Relatives of ad-Dumustaq were captured, namely, his

daughter's sons, as well as many of his patricians. Ad-Dumustaq returned [to ar-Rūm] utterly defeated.

3. al-Kāmil fī 't-Ta'rīkh, ix, 43-44

“The Conversion of the Rūs” (375 A.H./985-986 A.D.)

Waradīs Ibn Lawn went to Constantinople and in it were the two kings who were the sons of Armanus (Romanos), Basil and Constantine. Waradīs harassed them and they called upon the Rūs king, asking for his help and offering their sister to him in marriage. She refused, however, to hand herself over to one whose religion differed from her own. The Rūs king then converted to Christianity and this was the beginning of Christianity among the Rūs. He married her. Then he went to Waradīs, and they engaged in battle. Waradīs was killed and the two kings were established in their dominion.

4. al-Kāmil fī 't-Ta'rīkh, ix, 521

“The Rūs Attack on Constantinople” (435 A.H./1043-1044 A.D.)

In this year, also in [the month of] Safar, a great multitude of Rūs arrived at Constantinople by sea. They communicated

with Constantine, the king of ar-Rūm, whereupon they did not conduct business with him and they returned [to their ships]. And ar-Rūm gathered together against their enemies. Some of the Rūs had departed their ships to the mainland, and some of them remained on [board] the ships. Ar-Rūm shot fire at the Rūs ships. The Rūs did not know how to extinguish the flames, and many of them were burned to death or drowned.

Those Rūs who were on the mainland fought and were hard-pressed [by ar-Rūm]. They bore [their predicament] stoutly, but then were put to flight and did not have any place to which they could flee. Those who submitted at once were enslaved, and were thus safe [from death], but those who refused to surrender were taken by force and ar-Rūm cut off their right hands. And the Rūs appeared as apparitions in the countryside. Only a few Rūs warriors who were [held as] captives with the son of the Rūs king were allowed to leave [unharm]. And this is enough of the evils of ar-Rūm.

5. al-Kāmil fī 't-Ta'rīkh, x, 65

“The Battle of Manzikert” (463 A. H./1070-71 A.D.)

In this year, Armanus, the king of ar-Rūm, left with 100,000 warriors from ar-Rūm, al-Franj, al-Gharb, ar-Rūs, al-Bajanak, al-Kurj, and other military units from that country.

They came in a great array, and [wearing] magnificent costume, heading towards the lands of Islām. Part of the confused military operation arrived at Malāzkird. News of this reached Sultān Alp Arslan when he was in the city of Khuwayya in Adharbayjān...

When Alp Arslan approached the enemy, he came upon their advance guard. The mass of men swerved, and in the front of the enemy's advance guard were approximately 20,000 Rūs warriors. They engaged in battle and the Rūs were defeated. The Rūs leader was taken captive. He was taken before the sultān and his nose was cut off. The booty of the king's retinue was taken and Alp Arslan ordered that it be sent to Baghdād.

6. al-Kāmil fī 't-Ta'rīkh, xii, 387

"The Tatar Invasion of Rūs Territory" (620 A. H./1223-1224 A. D.)

The Tatars took possession of the land of the Qifjāq (Qipchaq), and the Qifjāq became dispersed. Many Tatar military units went into the land of the Rūs, which is a large country, elongated and broad, and which shares a common border [with the Qifjāq]. The religion of the Rūs is Christianity. When [news of the Tatar advance] reached the Rūs they all assembled and agreed to do battle with the

Tatars when the latter marched towards them. After the Tatars [had] remained in the land of the Qifjāq for some time, they went to the land of the Rūs in the year 620. When the Rus and the Qifjāq [who had fled their land] learned of the news, they readied [themselves] for the battle.

The Rūs went onto the road to confront the Tatars before the Tatars reached their country. They reached the Tatars on the march, and the Tatars pulled back. The Rūs and the Qifjāq were overconfident; they thought that the Tatars had withdrawn out of fear of them, and because the Tatars lacked adequate strength for the battle. But the Tatars now began to pursue the Rūs earnestly, and [it was they who] were now withdrawing. And those Tatars followed right after the Rūs for twelve days. Then the Tatars suddenly fell upon the Rūs and Qifjāq. The Rūs and Qifjāq previously had felt safe from the Tatar warriors, and they suddenly realized the strength of the Tatars. Many of the Rūs were not prepared for the battle, but a great number of Tatars had come upon them. The two armies vigorously persisted [in the battle, the like of which struggle has not been heard of before.

The battle continued for many days. Then, however, the Tatars were victorious and vanquished the Rūs and Qifjāq, putting them to flight in a great rout which was followed by a massacre. The slaughter was great in this defeat of the Rūs, and only a few Rūs warriors escaped death. All [the

baggage] that the Rūs had brought with them was taken by the Tatars as plunder. Those who escaped the battle fled to the lands of Islām, travelling along the roads in a desperate manner. The Tatars followed them, killing and plundering, and laying waste to the land until most of it was devastated.

Then, most of the important Rūs merchants and wealthy men gathered together, carrying their precious possessions with them. They traversed the sea to the lands of Islām in a number of ships. When they approached the port in which they wished to stop, one of their ships crashed [and sank]; the Rūs on that ship drowned except for some whom they could rescue. It is the habit of the sultān to take a slave girl from every ship which crashes in the port. He took many things from that one. The remaining ships were safe. The survivors notified him of the Tatar invasion.